

W r e s t l i n g P e r s p e c t i v e

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Does Professional Wrestling Need To Be So Violent?

By - Michael McGowen

No one can argue that professional wrestling is a very violent form of entertainment or sport. Punches and kicks delivered to various parts of the anatomy, throats dropped across ropes and railings, bodies slammed to the mat and floor, chairs cracked across heads and backs, a variety of foreign objects ranging from brass knuckles to fire are used, and heads rammed into knees, turnbuckles, ringposts, railings and floors, are a regular part of the product. There are various gimmick matches that take place in cages, have the participants tied together with rope or leather straps, or have the ropes wrapped in barbed wire. Lately, we've even seen coils of barbed wire and explosive charges laid outside the ring in Japan. All this, and large quantities of blood from the nick of a razor blade. It almost sounds like the gladiatorial games in ancient Rome.

Wrestling, however, pales in comparison to the level of extreme and graphic violence presented in many movies and television programs. Although we've seen beatings and torture inflicted during matches or angles, there hasn't been a murder committed as part of one yet. Of course Eddie Gilbert did hit Jerry Lawler with a car three years ago as part of an angle, and more recently, Harley Race, Sid Vicious and Big Van Vader tried to blow up Sting and Davey Boy Smith. However, considering the amount of blood and gore seen during the Seventies and early Eighties, wrestling has been sanitized to a certain extent, with the notable exception of the blatant and implied physical and sexual abuse of women by every promotion in the United States.

Violence is an ingrained part of professional wrestling, as it is with hockey and American football. The difference is that hockey and football aren't orchestrated, while professional wrestling is an arranged sport where the crucial elements are outlined in advance. The violence in legitimate sports is due to the competitive and aggressive nature of athletes and the games themselves. Professional wrestling is simulated violence, comparable to what is performed in movies and television. Given what professional wrestling is, where does it fit into the ever-increasing debate and outcry over the role violent entertainment plays in American society?

A CNN special on television and movie violence reported the results of a recent study stating that, by the time they finish elementary school, American children witness approximately 15,000 acts of violence, including about 4,000 murders. A mother interviewed in the segment told of forbidding her young son to watch *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* after he "karate-kicked" one of his playmates following a Saturday morning episode. With that in mind, how many children go out and practice wrestling holds and maneuvers after an hour or two of watching wrestling on the weekend? I would imagine quite a few, considering that I and the other kids in my neighborhood did just that ourselves, just as many of you reading this did. We even went to the trouble of building our own ring in my backyard, ropes and all, so we could have our own matches. Being that we were young kids, and not realizing the truth about wrestling, we aped what we saw on television. Of course we all got hurt. At least until my dad made us stop following several phone calls from irate parents.

Now, I'm a parent with two children, who wrestles with them on the living room floor, just as my dad did with me. They don't watch wrestling often, only occasionally sitting in front of the TV when someone catches their eye. I've taken great pains to explain that professional wrestling is a performance and that they aren't really trying to hurt each other. They also know that Ric Flair is the best. But, I've found many times there are things in wrestling today that I'd rather my children did not see. Smoky Mountain Wrestling is an example.

I love SMW and consider it the best American promotion today with its old fashioned feuds, angles and hardcore wrestling style. But it is the most violent promotion in this country, with the possible exception of the USWA. With excessively violent angles such as the Dirty White Boy's hanging of Tim Horner, or the bloody massacre of Brian Lee by Kevin Sullivan, I find myself waiting until my kids go to bed so I can pop the tapes in my VCR and enjoy the action. This isn't a criticism of Jim Cornette or anyone else associated with SMW. I greatly love the promotion and consider the tapes I have prized additions to my collection. But doesn't that say something when I have to watch one of my favorite kinds of entertainment out of ear and eyeshot of my children?

Recent congressional hearings have senators warning the television and movie industries to clean up the violence from their product, or face a Congress willing and able to force them to do so with legislation. Imagine the profound effect on professional wrestling either choice could have. A worst case scenario would

have wrestling programs pulled from the air in order to comply with whatever voluntary or mandatory guidelines are in effect. Such a scenario would be lethal to WCW and the WWF. The only conceivable survivors would be the local independents, who do not rely on television exposure. At that point, we hardcores would value our tape collections even more.

With the possibility of wrestling's key medium over the past 40 years being pulled out from under it, you would think those running the business would have the incentive to make progressive changes to ensure survival. But shouldn't declining TV ratings, PPV buy rates, and box office receipts have been enough incentive already? Unfortunately, we know how that has been handled so far. Everyone from the promoters to the fans should realize professional wrestling is on the verge of following roller derby into extinction. Losing television outlets due to poor ratings is one thing. Losing them because much of the presentation is considered socially or morally unacceptable is quite another. Regrettably, it's rapidly coming to that point.

The one thing in the sport's favor is its usual invisibility to all, except those in the business and the fans. The piece CNN aired contained various clips of television shows, cartoons, and movies. Not one wrestling clip, however, was to be seen. While that invisibility has hindered correcting illegal and deceitful practices by promoters, it could provide an opportunity to escape the consequences stemming from the outcome of the congressional debate on television violence.

I ask why couldn't we have matches emphasizing the spectacular grace and skill of Jushin Liger, or the intense drama and psychology of the June, 1990 Mitsuharu Misawa/Jumbo Tsurata classic? Such matches lacked the gratuitous violence and blood normally seen in this country and Japan, while relying on those elements that make professional wrestling truly exciting: incomparable athletic skill coupled with well conceived and executed storylines. The time is right for such a revolution in the sport. The question is, who has the courage to make that vision happen?

Sidelines

Thanks To Sheldon Goldberg, Jeff Cohen and Evan Ginzburg for their kind plugs. The support is always appreciated.

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In Perspective: Jim Cornette

Last month, Smoky Mountain Wrestling promoter Jim Cornette shocked the wrestling world with his surprise appearance in the WWF. Days before his debut, Cornette spoke at length with David Skolnick and Paul MacArthur without once letting on about his WWF deal. In fact, Cornette criticizes the company for some of its decisions in this July 20, 1993 interview. While liberally augmenting his comments with colorful language, Cornette speaks at length about SMW, the progress it has made, the current state of the wrestling business, and his falling out with Stan Lane. Part two of this interview will appear in our next issue.

Wrestling Perspective: Why don't we start with what you were doing before Smoky Mountain and how it got started?

Jim Cornette: What was I doing before Smoky Mountain Wrestling? Actually, waiting for Smoky Mountain Wrestling (laughs). I've wanted to do this for a long time. At the time I left WCW, I decided to just sit back for a couple of months and not really do anything, which I did. Then we went over to Memphis for a couple of months and did the thing with the Fabs, but I was trying to get the ideas and the plan together for Smoky Mountain Wrestling. It's something that me and Bobby (Eaton) and Stan (Lane) had ridden up and down the roads at night. I booked the territory in the car with the Midnight Express through like 1994, just in my head back in '87 and '88. And son of a gun if a lot of stuff hasn't happened that I thought of then, to be honest with you.

WP: Kind of like a five-year plan.

JC: It's kind of amazing that we've been able to do pretty well as close to what I thought would be a great round of stuff for the first year and a half of a promotion. It's amazing we've been able to do that much that I actually considered before and with a lot of the same people. Not always, obviously. But anyway, that's kind of

what I did. Stan and I just worked some independent shots during 1990, some fun. Various reasons for doing whatever I did. But I've been working on this from four months after I left WCW until I got started and that's all I'm doing now. I don't have time to do this, much less anything else.

WP: How did you get all the guys together?

JC: It wasn't really hard to find good talent because with the lack of different promotions around today, there were a lot of guys that were not working or not working anywhere regularly. Actually at the time we started, the best group of talent that you could possibly put together for a promotion, most of them were not affiliated with any promotion (laughs). It's just the way things got. Obviously, we didn't call Van Hammer. So we didn't have to worry about that. But there were a lot of good guys. There were several key positions that were easy to fill. There were a couple of key positions that were hard to fill. The problem with those is they're very hard to fill with any promotion these days. Everybody's talking about the lack of babyfaces in professional wrestling and there is a lack of babyfaces. The ones that are available, we've got practically all the good talent that's available that wants to work a territory. I mean just to be honest. Road Warrior Hawk, he doesn't want to work a territory, I don't think. Unless it was a big money type of deal and he's going back to WCW. But you know what I'm saying. For all intents and purposes, we've got a good block of the available talent. Now there's some guys who are under contract to one of the two groups that I would love to get the chance to use because I could use them so much better than what they're being used. But even if you're used crummy in WCW, you're still making guaranteed money, so a lot of guys are willing to put up with it while it lasts. We called the guys up and said, "Look, this

is what we want to do. We're going to start television. We're going to run with that for three or four months. We're going to start running some house shows on a limited basis and we're going to upgrade our schedule as soon as we possibly can." Basically, that's what we've done. That's one reason why we've been able to get guys to stick with us because we don't bullshit them. We don't lie to them and we don't tell them that they're coming in and be a main event guy and make this much money and then don't book them half the time and book them on the first match and pay them half. We tell them up front what we want to do to start out with and how much money they're going to make and we honor that. At the same time, in return for that, we haven't had anybody walk out on us, anybody hold us up for a ton of money, anybody really cause problems with the exception of Buddy Landell. He was more or less an experiment that failed. Just because Buddy will be Buddy.

WP: With his reputation, why take a chance with him?

JC: Because Buddy will reform (laughs). Buddy will reform about once or twice every six months and he called me and said, "I want to work somewhere." His parents live here in Knoxville, he's from here. I know what kind of talent he's got and how good worker he is. I said, "Well jeez, let's give it a try." Actually, if I could have had Buddy for the last month I had him and not the first four, he would have been great because he started buckling down and trying to work. But at that point, he had already pissed several people off and had done some stuff. It was too late. But really for the most part, we don't have the guys that walk out on us in the middle of the thing and we don't have all the other problems that plague a lot of other places simply because we don't lie to anybody coming in. They have no legitimate gripe.

If something doesn't take place we never told them was going to, we just said this is what we hoped to do and we're going to try our best. I think that's the way I always wanted to be told things and always wanted to be treated and if you do that, nobody's got a legitimate problem. I think we've had a lot of good guys and we've done as good a business as just about anybody could do under the circumstances of the way the business is today.

WP: You really carved out a niche for yourself. How long did you sit there and plan what area you were going to pick out? It was obvious that you were focused as opposed to a lot of promotions that start up and try to promote everywhere that will book them.

JC: The way that I thought of it is jeez, I was living in Charlotte. A lot of people must think Charlotte is halfway across the world from where I am now. It's only like 210 miles. My house in Charlotte to my house here in Morristown is like 216 miles. I just noticed the various places we'd gone in the past and worked and the response that you get from the fans tells you a lot about if a place likes wrestling or not. There was always tremendous response from the people in western Virginia and eastern Kentucky and western North Carolina. When you look at it on a map, the territory that we are promoting and attempting to spread into, which when I say spread I mean spread to the next TV market over, I'm not talking about taking over the country, but this area comprises some of the best cities in what was once four different territories. It was part of the old Southeastern, the Fullers and later, Continental; part of Jim Crockett's area; part of well, West Virginia hadn't had a territory in so long that it's not applicable. The last time was the early Seventies and eastern Kentucky is really part of Jerry Jarrett's territory when he had TV up in Lexington, although it's been a long time. It's just a conglomeration of different territories that used to exist and don't anymore. I'm like, "Boy, if we center here. It's a low cost of living area. There's towns

that haven't seen live wrestling in a long time. The fans are really rabid. They're not smart fans by any stretch of the imagination, which is what you need to draw big money." You need people who aren't smartened up to the wrestling business. Unfortunately, there's not hardly any pockets of that in the country left except maybe this one and a few places that haven't had wrestling in 20 years. I know people think differently and I've talked to (Dave) Meltzer about this and Wade (Keller) and I love what you guys do and you guys are dedicated to the wrestling business. Meltzer is. The newsletters are going to exist and I don't feel like you ought to think of them as a hated enemy and I would rather have my business talked about in a newsletter that goes to a target audience of 5,000 hardcore fans that are going to come anyway than exposed on the front page of the *Atlanta Constitution* like WCW did. That newspaper is thrown on the front door of people who don't care about wrestling or maybe are just casual wrestling fans, who might go once in a while and read stuff like that and say, "Ahh, it's all fixed," and they never go again. You need people who will at least believe in your product to draw the big houses because the hardcore fans are not numerous enough in the country to draw any one territory enough money to stay in business.

WP: Is this the only place you thought of?

JC: The other place that I think a wrestling promotion would make a go, and all things considered is not counting for the economy is obviously, the old Mid-South territory, Louisiana, Arkansas, part of Texas, Mississippi. Those were the most rabid wrestling fans I've ever seen in my entire life. I mean anywhere. But you have two down sides to that. Number one is you've got to live there and number two is there is not enough quality wrestlers living within a driveable distance to make a territory feasible starting from scratch because unless you bring a bunch of guys in and tell them, "Move here and we're running six days a week from the start." Your trans

would be enormous or it would be a pain in the ass for the guys to get there. In Knoxville, we're 240 from Charlotte, it's 210 miles from Atlanta, 180 miles from Nashville and if you just take into account the number of good wrestlers living in those three places alone, we knew we had talent coming up the yin-yang and didn't have to fly anybody.

WP: On the flipside, doesn't most of your talent now live within a 30-mile radius?

JC: That's a year and a half later. Now guys are starting to move here. When we first started out, we did a TV taping and a couple of spot shows in a weekend and they didn't see us again for three weeks. Now we're running four days a week so it's more feasible. You couldn't ask a guy to move to work five times a month. But as our schedule has expanded, it's become easier for people to do that. Also, it opens up bringing guys in from New Jersey or Minneapolis or wherever they may live and say, "Okay, we can't trans you. But you can come down here and move here and we will give you enough dates to make it." It used to be some territories would say, "Yeah, move on down here. We'll use you." You move your family and you get there and you're booked eight times that month. I didn't want to do that to anybody either.

WP: What type of wrestler are you going to make that offer to?

JC: You see there is no type of wrestler. If you're casting a movie, you need the bad guy, you need the good guy, you need the love interest, you need the best friend. You need all different types of characters and actors. If you're putting together a wrestling territory, you need all different types of wrestlers. Anybody that I see that I think, "Hey, I can do this with that guy or that guy's a good talent. Or hey, this is the type of guy we don't have right now." That's who I might make an offer to. If I see a guy that's a great talent, but I just for the life of me can't think what I can do with him now, why waste him? I'm not going to bring him in because later on when I have that idea, I

can make some money with him.

WP: How did you find these guys?

JC: In our first year and a half, we've concentrated on talent that's known because that's another one of my pet peeves. Everybody says, "The new territories, the small territories, have to be a training ground for guys so they can go on to the big promotions." Why do I want to train a guy to go make somebody else money? I'm paying and I'm trying to draw money with him and he don't know what he's doing. But he's going to go on after learning here. That's not the only reason that I would bring somebody in. I wouldn't start somebody from scratch right now. If I was selling out and all the houses were drawing and everybody was making a ton of money, I'd say, "Okay, this kid's had 15 matches. He looks like a great prospect. We'll bring him in and stick him in the first match and let him learn something."

WP: Isn't that what happened with Bryan Clark?

JC: Well, no. Bryan Clark was more advanced than that. Bryan Clark at the stage he first went into WCW at the Clash, I wouldn't have touched him with a 10-foot pole. But then two years later, I saw him and said, "Son of a gun, he has a good attitude. He wants to learn." He had learned a lot. For a guy his size, he did some great stuff and I said, "Boy, here's a guy who's weird looking enough to be a disciple of Kevin Sullivan and still is credible enough in his own right to be a good middle card guy." That's the kind of guy you want to give experience to. You don't want to take a guy into your territory and train him from scratch. It's a bad position because where do they go? Right now in today's economic wrestling climate, they're going to have to go somewhere else. A guy like Chris Candito. He is f—in' tremendous. He is going to be a really, really good talent. But he's been in the business three, four, five years. I wouldn't have taken him in his first match. That's one good thing about some of the independents where you just wrestle here and there. You can at least break in

and get your feet wet and then somebody will notice you. I'd seen Candito from when I'd been up in Philly and I talked to him and we spent some time together and I knew he had never worked what I'd call a real actual territory, working steady every week and programs and angles with a TV show. But at the same time, he'd been in the ring long enough that he could hold himself up and you could teach him the things he needs to know. That's the kind of guy I'm looking for if I'm going to bring in somebody that nobody's ever heard of down here. I want to bring them into where they can get over with the people. Then a lot of times, guys have become available from the other groups: You definitely want to bring them in if they fit you style. I had no second thoughts about bringing Tracey Smothers in. We worked with him. I knew how great he was. Just because he had been with WCW is not a plus. In fact, it was a minus because he had been a heel. But we bought him in the first week on TV as a babyface, where he ought to be, and just acted like he had never been any different other than an interview where we acknowledged he's done some things in his past that he didn't appreciate but now he's back in the right mode and we took off with it from there. I don't look for a guy just because he's got a name or he's worked for the WWF or the WCW. I look for a guy I've known, that I know is a good guy with a good attitude that will work hard and is a good worker and somebody who I have an idea about.

WP: Would an example be when there was talk of you bringing in Tony Atlas? While a lot of people were coming down on his working ability, he would fit what you had planned for him to a tee.

JC: Exactly. That's the thing. A lot of people knock Tony Atlas' work. Number one, he's a great interview. Number two, he looks fantastic and number three, he may not be at the height of his physical ability as far as dropkicks and flying head scissors anymore. But he's been in the business for 15 years and he knows how to do things you tell him to do. He knows how

to get himself over and he knows how to relate to the fans. That's something that no matter how good an athlete is, that's something that takes years and experience to learn. If you're going to go with a guy in the main event spot, you can't go with a green guy cause he ain't going to get over with the people, no matter how good an athlete he is. He won't be able to talk to them and he won't be able to know to do the right things to have a money drawing match. When you take a guy to Atlanta, and I'm not talking about Atlas here. I'm talking about anybody that people say, "Aww, Jesus, he's a slug." When you take a guy and put him in a spot where it's obvious to him and everybody else that they really don't care if he's there or not, why is he going to go out and break his back? Some guys will because they have that inclination, like a Bobby Fulton, who's going to work hard in any situation. But a lot of guys, and you can't blame them, are going to go, "Well jeez, they told me this and they told me that and I'm here doing nothing and nobody cares I'm around so I'm going to save what's left of my physical well being for when I can really bust my ass and it will mean something to somebody."

WP: Has Smoky Mountain been a success in your mind at this point?

JC: You know, there's two ways to look at that. Is it where I wanted it to be a year and half later? No, we haven't gotten that far. But a year and a half ago, I didn't know how crummy the whole wrestling business was going to be.

WP: Would you have still done it?

JC: It still had to be done because I just think that there was too much of a void that needed to be filled not to try to fill it. It's been harder than I thought. Are we where I wanted to be a year and a half later? No. But given the state of the business and the way things have gone and the fact that today we're out drawing WCW and WWF shows that take place in our area just about. Well I should really just say WCW because the WWF doesn't even run here. I think with the TV ratings and house shows we

have drawn and the stuff we have done in a time where everything was the shits, I think we've actually done better than anybody would have ever thought we could of. When you consider that WCW will come into the Knoxville Coliseum with the return of Ric Flair and Flair, Anderson and Sting versus the Hollywood Blondes and Windham in a six-man tag and Vader and Davey Boy Smith in a world title match and draw 400 people and we would run Morristown, Tennessee, at East High School a week later with Bullet Bob Armstrong in his sons' corner against the Heavenly Bodies and me and we'd have 250 more (laughs), we're doing something right in a very limited market. Five years ago, this stuff would have been selling out.

WP: What do you think needs improving and what are the promotion's strong points?

JC: Our strong point is definitely the content of our TV. It doesn't look like the WWF show, but at the same point, everyone I've talked to universally, whether they're in or out of the business, says, "Jesus Christ, you guys have got the best TV in wrestling." I think our talent has been a strong point and our live shows are always good. We just don't have stinky shows. Those are our strong points. The points that need to be fixed are partially beyond our control, but at least we know what they are. We need a couple more strong TV markets. The whole wrestling business, it's hard to get strong TV markets. We need that. Basically, we need to draw more fans (laughs).

WP: If I'm the General Manager of a television station, particularly given the state of the wrestling business and the falling numbers, with the exception of Monday Night Raw, how do you convince me to run Smoky Mountain in my market?

JC: I'm glad you asked that question because a lot of people say, "How do you convince people to run your show instead of WCW or WWF?" That ain't hard. I'm being serious. If they're going to run a wrestling show, they're more likely to run ours more than anyone else's. Just because

we say, "Look, we not only are going to be coming into the area once a month with live events, we're going to advertise on your station when we do it. We have our wrestlers available for co-promotions with your kids club or anything they have that's going on with a particular station in the market. We've got our ratings in other markets to prove that people watch the show. We will be a more locally oriented program. We'll even tape television in your viewing area, which nobody else is doing in these markets." We're the only syndicated television program that tapes anywhere in east Tennessee. The only other one is the country dance thing they've got on the Nashville Network. The last time eastern Kentucky saw a taping was when the tube was being invented. But the problem is, number one, with the glut of syndicated programming going over to all the Fox stations because the networks, ABC, CBS and NBC, have taken up so much time on their affiliates that all the syndicated programs, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Kung Fu: The Next Generation*, *Brady Bunch: Next Generation*. Everything goes to the Fox station and they're jammed. Then you've got infomercials. The Pocket Fisherman, the Ronco Record Selector and the Goddamn Miracle Varnish Remover paying these stations \$1,500, \$2,000 a week just to run this infomercial. They get that money in hand, they don't have to do any work for it and they use it to buy *Cheers*. The only thing is all of the TV stations know, and some will admit it, they drive the viewers away in droves. You've got to get a Program Director or a Sales Manager that doesn't have to like wrestling, but has to not, not like wrestling and you've got to get one that says, "Hey, I want people to watch the station and we'll sell advertising and it will be a good local tie-in thing." Basically, that's how you do it.

WP: At the same time, do you have to live down the reputation WCW and the WWF had with these stations?

JC: It was harder at first because we were just going in saying this is what we're

going to do. Now it's not as hard and they don't look at you so cross-eyed because now you're saying this is what we are doing in these other places.

WP: What is your average rating in your markets?

JC: It's hard to say. In Knoxville, the WWF show does a 2 rating and a 9 share, I think. We're on the same station. They're on from 10 to 11, we're on from 11 to 12. We do a 3 rating and a 12, 13 share. WCW here is on the CBS station Saturdays at noon and we do the same number they do. We're on the Fox station Sunday mornings at 11 o'clock. When WCW was up against us in the Tri-Cities, Johnson City, Bristol, Kingsport, they were on the Fox station, we're on the NBC station. We did a 2 rating and a 10 share and they did hash marks. That was after we'd been on like six months. In the February book, we did a 4 rating and a 20 share and this was Sundays at 11 o'clock in the morning on the NBC station. The second place show did a 1 rating and a 7 share. So they've moved us to Saturdays at noon now on that station. They moved us two weeks before the May books and we tied for first place in the time slot after being there two weeks. Up in eastern Kentucky, we're number one in the time slot. We did a 3 rating and a 13 share against *Saturday Night Live* in Beckley, West Virginia. We're either the number one show in the time slot or close to it at all stations. We out rate every other wrestling program that's on in competition with us in any of our markets. At least that shows that there's interest there and the people that are going to watch wrestling are watching our show.

WP: What about camera cutbacks?

JC: It's real simple. When business went in the toilet for everybody back in April and May, we started taking in less money, as did everybody else. WCW's average house was like \$4,500 in the month of May. Ours was a little bit less than that. But at the same token, we don't spend \$40,000 on our house show. We were taking in less money and the TV production, which we've had a

daggum good TV show for a long time, was one of our major expenses. We sat and looked at it and said, "Jesus Christ, we need to cut back on this until we work on some sponsorship deals that we're working on to help try to pay for part of the production costs." We found that we could save an incredible amount of money by going to a two-camera setup instead of the four cameras and losing the slo-mo. Basically what we've done is go from four cameras to two cameras and we lost our slo-mo replay. Slo-mo isn't what sells tickets, although it does make a nicer looking show. We did several of those in December. We had to cancel one taping because we couldn't get the truck for the date that we needed so we just did it like this. Dave Meltzer called me and said, "Man, those last two weeks shows were some of the best I've seen so far." People are looking at what's in the daggum thing. The TV stations look at the production because they don't know anything about wrestling. When we're trying to sell a TV station, we sure show them one of the good shows.

WP: But in your mind it's like a handheld camera at a Steamboat-Flair match is still going to show they're working well.

JC: Yeah. We have one floor camera and one play-by-play camera. With our four camera setup, we had two floor cameras, a play-by-play and one camera at the set. Now we have a floor camera, one instead of two, a play-by-play camera and the set camera goes back and doubles as the floor camera. Basically it hasn't been cut down that much. Not using that production truck, we save a lot of money and like I said, we're working on some sponsorship deals and a couple of other things to augment our production costs and then we'll go back to the truck and try to strike a happy medium. That's basically the situation. It's all economics and when you can get something that's almost as good for about half of the money, the way that the whole business is these days, you do it for the short term and save the bucks.

WP: Why don't we shift gears a bit and talk

about something Smoky Mountain is becoming known for: heavy blood and violence that you don't see in other promotions?

JC: (laughs) Everybody talks about heavy blood and gosh, let's see when was the last time, there may have been one or two little exceptions, but the Kevin Sullivan thing was the last time we had blood on television and that was at the March taping. Ricky Morton bled a couple of times last week at our house shows and Jimmy Del Rey did once. We don't have a lot of blood compared with what all the promotions used to. We have more than anybody does today. That's one of the things that makes people excited about a wrestling match and when it's called for. We don't have guys going out there going, "Okay, we've got to have a bunch of blood tonight." One of the hottest things we got going now is the Armstrongs against me and the Bodies. It doesn't need blood, or at least not at this point. The Dirty White Boy and Tracey Smothers had some blood because they were having some chain matches. How can you have a chain match without having blood? So it's whatever the situation calls for, but when was the last time WCW had a chain match? When was the last time the WWF had the Rage in the Cage? So we don't do it just for the sake of doing it. We do it because the people watching the match go, "Something's missing here." If it needs it, we have it. As far as heavy violence, Jesus Christ, it's professional wrestling and the people here in east Tennessee, they want to see somebody get hit over the head with a chair. They were brought up on Ron Wright for Christ sakes. In those days, they didn't use the blade. That was ridiculous because people could tell. They busted each other open. In Tennessee, it's a whole different thing 'cause who still draws a house in Memphis? Jackie Fargo. He's a legend. When you go around in Memphis and you ask people, professional wrestling, name four. They're going to say Jerry Lawler first, Jackie Fargo, Tojo Yamamoto and Jerry Jarrett. The average people, not the ones that go to the matches every week, but your average guy on the

street. We've gone to TV stations here in east Tennessee, we've gone to businesses. The names that they talk about, that people that haven't followed wrestling in a while, are Ron Wright, Whitey Caldwell, the Fullers and Bob Armstrong. When I went to get the handcuffs for our Rage in the Cage, these people never went to a wrestling match, but they said, "What's old Ron Wright doing?" Once you're over here and once you're a main event guy, they remember you forever. The one good thing is luckily enough in Tennessee, we can still drag these guys out. The Mongolian Stomper. Nobody thinks he's 57 years old. They think he's the meanest man in the world.

WP: And they still think Bob Armstrong can kick the crap out of him.

JC: And he can. That's the thing. Bob looks better than anybody. So the deal is with them brought up on that style of wrestling around here, you can't give them Marcus Bagwell cause they'll fart at him. These hillbillies will beat the f— out of Marcus Bagwell. I'm not knocking Marcus, but that's just the way it is. They can see better fights for free going out on Saturday night than they can by going to WCW matches. In eastern Kentucky for Christ sake, (laughs) Ron Wright has so much heat. He has a scrapbook with pictures of the airplane he had that they burned. They beat him back to the airport and burned his single-engine plane that he used to fly around. He's been stabbed with hawk bills and cut with knives and been shot at. These people are serious. If they don't see somebody get hit with a chair and busting them open with a chain and shit like that, they think, "Well f—, these guys are all a bunch of p-ssies."

WP: On the other side, given the wrestlers' lifestyle, whatever that may be, and hepatitis and AIDS, and whatever diseases can be transmitted through blood, do you think it's ethical to encourage it?

JC: If somebody says to me and I'll say this - and I'm not going to mention the guy's name - one guy, a part-time guy, said to me,

"In my job, I work with a law enforcement agency and I carry prisoners around and some of these guys are HIV positive and I can't do that." I said, "Hey, that's cool." I've got no problem with that at all. But for the most part, my God, I just don't see that it's that big a deal. Most of these guys have known each other for years.

WP: That might be the problem.

JC: (laughs) You know what I mean. Me and Bobby Fulton, for example. If Bobby Fulton was going to bleed on me, I'd be more worried about one of the fans coming up to me and sticking me with a daggum ice pick. Truthfully, nobody that's been here... well jeez, there are some things that you need to do to get the match over and it's not that big a worry. I'd be more worried about flying in an airplane. I'm terrified of flying, but sometimes you've got to do it.

WP: If a wrestler came up to you and said, "Look, I've got a thing about this. This really bothers me." Would you accept that? Would that affect how you would promote that person?

JC: No. If I thought that they were still a talent that could draw money in the territory, I'd keep them out of shit where they would bleed. Most of the guys are also my friends as well as working for us. So it's not like, "Hey, you do this or f— off." That's worked to our detriment at times because people tell me I'm too nice. No, that wouldn't present a problem either. Like I say, if I was saying, "Okay, tonight you're going to have to screw three hookers unprotected." But if I said, "Tonight, you're going to have to get a little color." What the f—, you could get hit with a truck too.

WP: The WWF likes to say they're family entertainment. Would you say the same? If you had a kid, would you let them watch Smoky Mountain?

JC: Yeah, this whole thing has been so blown up about family entertainment. The wrestling fans, and this used to be the case all over Memphis when I was growing up, you had kids there, toddlers, babies. One woman was having a daggum baby in

Louisville and would not go to the hospital until she saw who won the main event. They brought the kids up bringing them to wrestling matches. They became wrestling fans. It was not only a thing to do each week, but it was a meeting place for all your friends, hangout at the matches and talk to so-and-so. Those people, when they grew up and had kids, then they brought their kids to the wrestling matches. You don't see animals being mutilated, you don't see graphic sex. You see someone get hit in the head with a chair and busted open. Well, Jesus Christ. They showed that movie on TBS, *Bad Boys* with Sean Penn. He takes f—in' Coke cans, which is where I got the idea with Ricky Morton at Christmas time. He takes the Coke cans in the pillow case and bashes this guy's brains out. There's blood everywhere and it's fake blood. I always wanted to sit down with somebody at TBS programming and say, "You show boxing, right?" "Yeah." "The boxers bleed, right?" "Yeah." "Okay, that's real blood in a real sport, right?" "Yeah." "And you show it." "Yeah." "You show movies." "Yeah." "The movies, the actors get beat up and you've got fake blood." "Yeah." "So what's the f—in' deal with wrestling? Some people think it's fake blood. That would be a movie. Some people think it's real blood and that would be a boxing match and they show both. What's the daggum deal?" If somebody is going to watch a wrestling program and a child is going to turn to crime or become a pervert from something they saw on a wrestling show, then they don't have any parents. They've obviously got a miserable homelife or some type of chemical deficiency in the brain because that ain't going to do it.

WP: It seems like it's overstated. They're editing Bugs Bunny cartoons now.

JC: Yeah, everybody's too touchy. I watched the Road Runner and the f—in' Wile E. Coyote (Genius) and I never thought about dropping anybody off a cliff. There's weird people. A lot of people are f—ed in the head and a lot of people are going to get ideas from anything. Let's keep it to what

common sense would tell me. If they were showing like gang rapes on television and some teenagers would be susceptible. "Yeah, let's go do that. That would be great." Well, okay, that's one thing. But if you're showing a wrestler getting hit over the head with a chair and bleeding and it's clear that the guy who did it is the bad guy and it shouldn't be that way, then what's the harm. We could go on forever with examples. To me, everybody's too touchy. We have violence because that's realistic and the basic premise of wrestling is that good must triumph over evil. But think of how many movies you see where they put the heat on that bad guy in the first hour and a half and boy the last 30 minutes, it's time for the hero to kick some ass. It's entertainment and the only thing different between wrestling and that movie is for wrestling to draw money, you have to make the people believe as much as possible that it's really taking place without any cooperation of the participants because they really have to get mad at that son of a gun and see him get his butt kicked. You have to have credible, believable stuff. Let's put it this way. You have to be consistent. WCW had Ric Flair and the Ding Dongs. The WWF has Doink and Kimala and then they've got Sean Michaels and Bret Hart. I don't think we have any kind of shit like that, stuff that don't fit in. Our good guys are good guys who are athletes and our bad guys are no-good sons of a gun who try to f— everybody around. They just do it in different ways. But you don't see anything on our program that's way out in left field and brings the level of credibility down. We don't have a lot of gimmicks. But when we do have a gimmick, it will stand out as a gimmick. Gimmicks have drawn a lot of money in wrestling, but they drew it at a time when most territories were filled with wrestlers and you had the gimmick and that made it all the more different. But now, when everybody is the man and this man and the other man instead of Bill, Bob and Joe, what's the use. Everybody's a gimmick. The gimmick would be having a real guy. Different stuff used in moderation draws money. When

we really go all the way and have a daggum gimmick in Smoky Mountain Wrestling, it's going to be an outrageous son of a bitch. But at the same time, the commentators will say, "Okay, we know this guy's really not from Mars. That's pretty well accepted. The problem is he really thinks he's from Mars and that's what makes him dangerous because he's a f—in' nut."

WP: Isn't that what you've got with Kevin Sullivan basically?

JC: With Kevin, he's still a real person. He's just a demented psychopath. The Frankenstein Monster in Los Angeles. That's still a well-remembered thing because they came out there and said, "Okay, Dr. Frankenstein built this guy in his f—in' laboratory," and everybody goes, "Yeah okay, I'm going to lift up my pillow and the Tooth Fairy has left extra money tonight." If they had the Frankenstein Monster out there, this is just my opinion, and the announcers had gone, "Okay, we know this f—in' guy ain't put together from dead bodies. But we don't know what the f--- the deal is with him to make him act like this. His manager, this mad scientist, seems to believe this shit and we don't know if he's trying to throw the other wrestlers off or trying to scare people or psyche them out. But he's one mean son of a bitch."

WP: That's what they did with the Moondogs originally.

JC: Exactly. Yeah, these guys are just f—in' crazy. People love to see freaks and nuts. They do. But you can't insult people's intelligence by having the announcer, who is the host of your program, if I had Bob Caudle come out and say, "Okay, here's the Invisible Man." Automatically, everything he says is a lie.

WP: It (the invisible man gimmick) was done once.

JC: I know, but not in Smoky Mountain Wrestling. That's the whole thing. Keep your credibility. On the surface of it, most wrestling people are strange, unusual,

bizarre or ridiculous. With Kevin Sullivan, instead of us saying he worships the Devil, he practices black magic.

WP: But that got over with him 10 years ago.

JC: But we can't do that over here or we'd have gotten kicked off TV. This is the Bible Belt for Christ sake. We can't even run high schools on Sunday. We didn't say that. What we said was, "This guy is demented, he's evil, he likes to control people's minds. He tries to get other people to do his dirty work." And that's believable. It's a whole lot more believable. Look at serial killers. They're the scariest things in the world because they're real. Are you more scared of Dracula or John Wayne Casey? When you're talking about a babyface, to me, Jerry Lawler is one of the great babyfaces because he's a real person, he's not a cartoon-looking Superman, Greek god. So people can identify with him. When he talked, he didn't do this wild, outrageous interview. He said what was on his mind. Same thing with Tracey Smothers. He's a real life guy. People know that this guy is from Springfield, Tennessee. Boy, he's a big son of a gun, but he's not a Greek god. He's an average guy. He says what he means. He talks to people and he tries to tell the truth. He's a good athlete. When he gets in that ring, he gives his best. I don't want babyfaces where the fans look at them like cartoon characters and super heroes. I want babyfaces that people can relate to. When they're getting beat up, I want the people to go, "Oh jeez, I hope he don't get hurt." That's a babyface. With a heel, you don't want Dracula. You want the serial killer. You want the guy that people really believe is a mean, nasty son of a gun who's going to try to f*** their favorite around at every given point. Like I said, when we finally do some real outrageous gimmick, we will still make sure that people know, hey, we don't believe this guy's from Mars. But we're afraid that he thinks he is and this a dangerous son of a gun because he's a nut (laughs). The voodoo guy, right. If the voodoo guy had come out and f—in' acted

like, in Global, Rasta the Voodomon. If he had come out and done all the shit and the announcers had said, "Well, you know, voodoo is like a religion in certain countries, Jamaica, West Indies, and evidently he feels this quite strongly." That's great. But the voodoo guy comes out and shakes his f—in' magic stick and the babyface doubles over, you've got two for the price of one. You killed your heel and your babyface.

WP: You should have told them something. You were standing right there.

JC: (laughs) I tried. I called Craig Johnson and Scott Hudson over and said, "Look guys. I know it's out of my hands and I know it's out of your hands. The people have to believe that the announcers are on the level and no matter what you do, you're not going to overcome what you've been told to say. If you came out and said 'Global Wrestling Federation. We're a brand new wrestling federation. We want your support. We're going to try to give you the best wrestlers and the best athletes. It's going to be an alternative to the other programming that you're seeing and in the months to come, we hope you'll get behind us and we'll grow with your support.'" I think it would have got over. But I said, "What you guys are having to say that we're the American office, the main office is in Barcelona, Spain. The world tag team champions are the English Barons or whatever they were and all this other stuff." I said, "People are automatically going to say that everything they say is a lie because that's bullshit. That's what you'll hear. Bullshit, click." People will say, "Bullshit," click, they turn to another channel. Bullshit, click, bullshit, click.

WP: Do you think you learned how not to promote by working Global?

JC: No (laughs). I knew that shit already (laughs). We went down just four, five times to tape at the Sportatorium. I tried to tell Joe, "I don't know if they're going to buy this." "This is going to be great." Whatever. I like Joe Pedicino, but he tended to have too grand ideas for what people would believe, I think. That's the

thing there. If we'd have started up Smoky Mountain Wrestling and said, "Smoky Mountain Wrestling is affiliated with Goddamn 14 different promotions around the world. We're going to be doing a pay-per-view in six months and we've got these champions coming in from all across America and dadada." Well, people would have gone, "Aww f—." But we say, "Hey, Smoky Mountain Wrestling is bringing wrestling back to you, the fans, on a local level and we appreciate your support and you're going to see some hot action in the months to come. We're going to do our best to bring it to you at affordable, family prices." People said, "Well, they can do that." Everybody has to be world, galaxy, global, international, universal, f—in' astronomical, milky way, galaxy. F—, it's ridiculous. Global, where are you running? Dallas. People see that stuff and they know when it's bullshit. But they can't say we're not Smoky Mountain Wrestling because we're all over these f—in' mountains.

WP: Why don't we get a little into a new topic: the Stan Lane situation?

JC: I wasn't going to say anything except with his "Torch Talk" a few things had to be answered. You read the letter (that Cornette wrote to *Pro Wrestling Torch*) and you know what they were. I don't want to say anything now to be honest with you. Just because Stan's a friend of mine. I've liked Stan and I've been with Stan for so long. Stan just changed his outlook on things and the whole thing stemmed from the fact that he just really didn't want to be in the business anymore. That just caused problems with me, who eats, sleeps and dreams it. I just didn't feel like, aww jeez, it's hard to say this without sounding like I'm trying to bury him and I'm not. But then by the same token, I was upset when I read the *Torch* thing. Not only did he try to babyface and say the reason was purely money, but he also in a backhanded way downgraded all the other guys in the territory who were working hard and, in some cases, outworking him. Stan's capable of a lot, but we weren't getting

what he was capable of and that was just a whole bunch of other things. We were going to have to make a change so we might as well make a change.

WP: You get the feeling from reading what he said and you said that there was a good friendship there and it doesn't seem that's the case now. It seems very strained.

JC: You know, disappointment is more the thing. I'm trying to say this without having anybody look like a total jerk or without coming out and knocking anybody.

WP: He has his viewpoints and you have your viewpoints.

JC: Stan has been in the business long enough to know that shit goes up and shit goes down. Stan felt like he should make more money each year that he is in the business than the proceeding year or that he was going backwards. That just ain't going to happen in any profession. If you're running a plumbing company, the year of the flood, you're going to make a fortune fixing all the shit. The next year, you ain't going to make jack. But that don't mean you give up and start a daggum carpeting company. I was disappointed in Stan that if... let's put it this way: If he'd have been running the thing and I'd have been working for him, because I love the business and he's a friend of mine, I'd have busted my butt and done whatever. I wouldn't have given him problems when I knew he already had problems. I just didn't get the same thing that I thought I would have given him when it was the other way around.

WP: Have you spoken with him since he left?

JC: Truthfully, I haven't. I'm not saying we never will. Probably we will later on at some point. It was just a disappointment to me because I could see what we could do and what was possible and if he had another job or something or another career that he was going directly into I could understand him saying, "I'm just not going to wrestle anymore." But as far as I know, he didn't. He's got things he wants to do, but he ain't

doing them yet. Stan's an only child and so am I.

WP: Did you find it disappointing because it's pretty hard to find a worker with Stan's charisma? Did you feel you were losing an asset in that respect?

JC: He was a Heavenly Body. It's hard to find Heavenly Bodies. Stan definitely has a lot of charisma. He had name value. But you've got to look at it from okay, here's what I'm paying and here's what I'm getting. In a territory, you've got to have good matches. You have to have a guy willing to work. If Stan's girlfriend's plane was late, so was he. That's not the way to run a daggum business.

WP: Was there pressure on him to move to Tennessee?

JC: There wasn't any pressure on him, but I told him, and I still think this is a fair assessment, "Stan, you're renting a house in Charlotte. You don't own one." I offered to take the ring truck down and move his stuff to Knoxville. He would spend \$200 a month minimum less on rent. He would save a hotel every night he was working so that was \$40 minimum every night he worked. He would save food on the road and a ton of gas. So making the same amount of money, he would come out, what do you think, \$1,000 a month ahead. I said, "Stan, Jesus Christ, we can't afford to pay you more than you're making now. You're already making more than anybody else. But you would come out further ahead if you would move." I mean it's not like we were asking him to move for six or eight shots a month. He knew he was figured in. He knew he would continue to be and would be on all the shows. But he just didn't want to move. The reason he didn't want to move was cause he knew that he didn't want to wrestle much longer and why move up here. This wasn't where he wanted to live forever. He's looking at it like that and it's a valid reason. But I'm also looking at a guy that wants more money to stay. I always worked the same whether I was in the Superdome or in Fort Polk, Louisiana. You've got to like doing

it for one thing and if you're sick, yeah, or if you've got an injury or something, that's one thing. All things being equal, you work the same way cause you take pride in what you do. If the guy won't work that way for \$200, but he will work that way for \$400, I'd rather get the guy that will work. The whole thing was I didn't mind paying Stan more for what he was capable of doing, but I did mind paying him more for what he seemed like he was willing to do.

WP: How did Tommy Young play into this, if at all?

JC: (laughs) Not at all other than Tommy and Stan were Felix and Oscar, the Odd Couple, driving together. The thing is we had Tommy as a road agent. Tommy Young, I felt with all the years he's been in the business and what he knew about the business, was a valuable asset. But unfortunately, he couldn't referee anymore. We had him coming in as a road agent, a glorified term that WCW uses, which mainly meant that he handled the music, he carried finishes, he made sure that the show ran smooth, he did things that needed to be done to keep our live events running smoothly. But when you sit there and look at the payroll and I mean cold-hearted business once again, if Tommy Young wasn't there, it didn't harm the house. The referee and the people that are already there really could handle his job. Now on big shows, if he had lived in town, I would have used him. But it was hard on some of the spot shows to have an extra guy on the payroll. So I told him, "Tommy, for the time being, we really can't have you on all the shows. It's not worth your while to just drive up for Knoxville. I realize that." I would like to get him back in some capacity with us in some point just because of his experience. But until I can offer him enough to make it worth his while, I'm not going to insult him and say, "Hey, I'll give you \$150 a week, go hang posters." But that left Stan having to make the trip by himself. Stan don't like to drive. Me, I don't like to fly. I'll drive 400 miles to avoid getting in a plane. Instantly, don't think a thing about it. But Stan don't like to drive. So that's

one of the things that hastened him either wanting more money or to not work or whatever because he would have to make the trip by himself. When you think about it, like I said, I can leave here and be where I lived in Charlotte in three and a half hours. It's not like we were asking him to come from Key West. That's the way Tommy played into it indirectly.

WP: Have there been pay cuts due to attendance problems?

JC: Everybody is still making the same amount of money as their original deal when they came in. We don't go back on our word. If a guy started with us and we said, "Okay, we'll pay you \$100." I'm just using that figure. Then he's still making \$100 a night. But if a guy started two months ago and we said, "Look, we're adding guys to the card, trying to have more variety and we can't pay you anymore than x dollars," then he's on that deal. Nobody has had their money cut since their original arrangement whenever that may have been.

WP: Have they seen peaks at one point? Let's say the house did real well, did they get a boost in pay for that show or are they getting a flat rate per show?

JC: We have given guys bonuses on real big shows that they were instrumental in. A couple of times, I've given extra for TV matches that I thought were just tremendous. I've given guys extra money. Not a lot, to be honest with you because when you think about it, we've got the best guarantees of any small promotion in the country today. The money is there whether the house is \$500 or \$5,000. The guys don't complain because you can say, "Hey, when it averages out, you're still ahead." A lot of the babyfaces make a lot of gimmick money. You don't feel the pressure to bonus them for a big house when Jesus Christ, in addition to their payoff, they have made \$600, \$700, \$800 because of that big house on gimmicks. Now the heels, then you would, but then also some of the babyfaces do give a percentage of their gimmick money to the heels that

they're working with since they're part of the reason. It's not like this everything's all for myself mentality that the big promotions have because one of the reasons these guys were picked to be here is because they understand how the real wrestling business works. They understand they're not TV stars, not movie stars. They're wrestlers and I feel the same way about myself. They don't have contracts and I don't have a contract. They understand that the wrestling business is up and down. That's why a lot of them are here because they're smart to the business. It's not a deal like, "Well, I've made all this souvenir money and I'm not going to give anybody anything" or "I drew this house." If that's not the case with a guy then he's not going to fit in here. As you can see by Ric Flair not drawing any money, here's the greatest wrestler in the world, he ain't drawing a dime because the people don't care about who they're sticking him in with. It takes two to hip toss (laughs).

WP: On a brighter note, Bobby Eaton was in for a while. You hadn't worked with him in a few years.

JC: It was great. The only drawback, and Bobby felt bad about this, the first month that he was here, he was so sick most of the time, he could hardly breath. He had a real bad bronchitis thing and he kept apologizing every night. "I couldn't do anything. I couldn't do anything." Almost puking after the matches. I said, "Bobby, don't worry about it." They had some great matches and he was tremendous. You know, Bobby is the kind of guy that you won't find anybody in the wrestling business saying anything bad about Bobby. Bobby's the kind of guy who knows this year that you can make a million dollars and next year, you'll make \$15,000. We treated him good, but you know what Bobby said, "Well, Goddamn it, whatever you give me, it's more than I'm making sitting at home watching TV." That's an attitude I always had. It's not just because I'm the one paying somebody now and all of a sudden I'm stingy. You've got to be realistic. He had a choice. He could sit

home for three months and not make any money or he could come and work with us and have fun. He didn't get hurt. He could make some money to pay bills.

WP: When we spoke to him earlier this year, he legitimately felt bad that he had to leave you.

JC: Oh yeah, I felt bad too because we're such good friends. At least, there's a guy you know is always going to give you his best effort and be conscientious to do whatever he thinks will help the business. A lot of people don't understand it. This is another reason why a lot of guys that are here in the business are not younger guys but guys that have been around. A lot of people today that have jumped right into contracts or into one of the big organizations, they don't understand, hey, if you don't do everything you can to help whatever office that you're working for, if they don't succeed, there's going to be that fewer places for you to work for in the future.

WP: Is that almost Bobby's downfall that he's too easy going and willing to put his career aside if asked?

JC: No, the thing is that's their fault. If you don't make the best use of your talent, that's your fault. The Midnight Express did jobs for two years straight but we were still over because we were all good workers who knew how to do it. We still had the TV time to go out there and get ourselves over. We were still involved in angles that would catch people's attention. What they've done with Bobby and what they've done with a number of their really good workers is they've just thrown them out on TV to get beaten. Never give them time to talk, never put them in an angle that's interesting. That's the way you kill talent. Look at how many jobs Ric Flair has done for Christ sake. Anybody that's a good worker, you can beat them in the context of what you're doing with them as long as you give them the TV time to get back over, then there's no problem. Somebody's always going to get beat. If you misuse your talent, it's your own fault. Especially if you misuse as

good a talent as Bobby Eaton. It's always been a part of the business. A lot of guys won't understand where you're going or what you're doing and sometimes you have to say, "Okay, there's five matches tonight and the heels are going over in three. So that means even though I'd rather not beat this guy, I got to beat him. But I'll do something for him next week on TV." The guys who say, "I ain't going to do that shit," then they get a bad reputation. Then again, if there's a reason, if you're just being misused and abused, then it's time to go somewhere else cause you're obviously not figured in. Now there's no place left to go so you've got to do it.

WP: If you jump back a few years, there was a big stink about Sting not doing a job for Terry Funk. How would you portray that since Sting knew he was being pushed to the moon compared to everyone else in the promotion?

JC: Truthfully, I was there and I don't remember, and I'm not saying this didn't happen, but I don't even remember anyone in the dressing room making a flap that Sting wouldn't do a job for him. Maybe the boys didn't know it until they read it in the sheets, which happens a lot. For anybody not to put Terry Funk over is crazy.

WP: Could it be that Terry, as good as he is, from a physical standpoint didn't look credible compared to a Sting or a lot of the muscleheads that were there?

JC: I, me, myself, I wouldn't do a job for daggum Van Hammer just because he's the shits and nobody cares about him anyway. But I would let f—in' Mongolian Stomper beat me all day long because he's over. The guys in the business today have forgotten that it's not what you look like, it's whether the people believe in you or not. When Bob Armstrong gets in the ring, people don't see a 53 or whatever year old guy who hadn't wrestled regularly in a number of years. They see a legend, a guy they remember seeing beat everybody from soup to nuts and the guy's in tremendous shape and could whip three-quarters of the guys in this territory in a shoot. At the same

time when they see Big Sky, seven feet tall, 350 pounds and can't stick his thumb in his ass, they fart. It's not what you look like, it's whether the people believe in you and whether the stuff that you do looks credible. I tell you what, Terry Funk can stick Sting's head up his ass any day of the week if he wanted to. But we've gotten away from that. "I can't do a job for that guy, his arms aren't as big as mine." Well f—, how big was Bruce Lee? You can go too far. I mean I wouldn't advocate bringing Cowboy Lang back and have him beat Harley Race, for Christ sake.

WP: Would you do it with the Lightning Kid?

JC: That's something else. God almighty, oh f—, oh Pete. I met the Lightning Kid a couple of times and I think he's a great guy and I think he does some outrageous stuff. When I heard they put him over Ted DiBiase, I cried. Damien Demento, that's one of those points where we're stretching credibility just a tad bit too far. My thing with Lightning Kid is the underdog deal. When he beat Razor Ramon, I thought that was tremendous. When Razor Ramon pounded the piss out of him and he ran off with the money, I thought that was great. But remember what happened, and this is not the same as, with the Mulkeys. They were over like a million dollars. They won a match and nobody gave a shit after that. They lost their mystique. If you've got an underdog, the whole point is he knows that he can't beat these guys but he won't quit trying. Then you give him a win every so great often and of course, he can go on TV and beat Mike Samson. But he can't beat a star. But he can give them their best. That's what we're doing with White Boy and Bobby Blaze right now. Bobby Blaze basically f—ed up and got a win over the Dirty White Boy. It was a sheer f— up and it will never happen again in 100 years. But White Boy was so upset that he said, "I want this f—in' little kid back in the ring." Bobby Blaze says, "You know what, that was a daggum fluke. I couldn't beat him again if I tried 100 times. But I tell you what, it felt awful good to me to do it. I got

my brains kicked out, but I beat the Dirty White Boy. The reason I did it was because Dirty White Boy looked at me like I was a joke. When I looked at him, I looked at him like he was a great champion. He made a mistake and I was lucky enough to come out on top. White Boy, if you want to wrestle me again, then I'll wrestle you. I know I can't beat you, but I'll never quit trying." How many people are going to identify with that? They're going to say, "That f—in' kid, he's got some guts. He knows the guy's going to kick his ass, but he's man enough to say, 'Well, I'll fight you anyway.'" So we had the match around and nobody got the stipulations on this right in any of the sheets. The deal is White Boy said, "I will wrestle you every time I get the chance to and if I beat you, it don't count. I can pin you 100 times. I'm going to beat on you until you say you've had enough of me and you leave the ring and admit you can't handle me. But if you beat me once, you win." So White Boy beats him three, four or five times in the course of the match, keeps right on going, pounds the shit out of him. He gets a little bit of a comeback at the end just to get the people to blow. The biggest pop you'll hear of the night is when White Boy has beat this guy to the point to where there's total silence. People are sick to death of it and then he's standing there and Blaze comes up and hits him right in the nuts. The place blows. It's the biggest pop of the night and he dives off the top and White Boy moves and White Boy gets on him and pounds the crap out of him and the referee finally says, "F— it, ring the bell. Blaze can't continue. Dirty White Boy is the winner." They drag Blaze out and cart him off and White Boy is mad because he won the match. That way, the people say, "That White Boy can kill somebody. But boy, that daggum Bobby Blaze, he wouldn't quit trying. What a kid." You have an underdog and he starts winning every week, he ain't an underdog anymore. With the Lightning Kid thing, I think they're giving him too many wins. He ought to be getting his ass kicked and the people will say, "Goddamn that Kid can do great stuff. But he ain't no bigger

around than a daggum fence post so he's getting his ass kicked, but he won't quit trying." (laughs) An underdog with a better than 50 percent won-loss record ain't exactly an underdog. There are NBA teams that don't do as well as the Kid's doing. That's what I think the difference is. But we're going for more hardcore credibility than they are so it works in their thing, but, I could use him for a toothpick." They admire guts around here, but if you go too far with it, it's the same thing with a pretty boy. He might appeal to some of the women, but he'll have instant heat with the guys cause they'll say, "F—, he blow dries his hair." (laughs) In California, everybody's got to look like a movie star because they see them on the street. Here in Tennessee, it's different. That's why the difference is you appeal to different people in different places. The Lightning Kid, everybody says, "The promoters have a size fetish." Look at the people we've used. I don't have any size fetish. Tennessee's always been a place for smaller guys to work. Chris Candito is a smaller guy, but his height matches his weight. Look at Bobby Fulton. Tim Horner ain't that big. We don't have a lot of big guys. We don't have guys that are seven feet tall and 100 pounds and we don't have guys that are five feet tall and 400 pounds. Perception is a lot. I don't put a lot of stock in perception as most people do in this business as far as the guy's got to be big and have a great body. The guy's just got to look like whatever it is he's supposed to be doing. So anyway, that's that (laughs).

WP: What's the situation with the NWA and trying to get NWA matches with the NWA champion?

JC: I just talked to Dennis Coralluzzo and he's stirring up some shit and Dennis is good at that. I love Dennis. I guess we can join the NWA, it just hasn't been a point that it would be real useful for us so far so we haven't done it.

WP: There have been rumors that you've been trying to join.

JC: No. We had talked about it and I said,

"Yeah, we may do that just to piss somebody off." The thing is any wrestling promotion that is a regular viable promotion can join. They can't turn you down. It's not a matter of trying to join. It's a matter of if you decide to do it.

WP: Big deal. WCW can say that's the end of the NWA belt.

JC: No, they can't say that. They can say that's the end of us using the NWA belt. As long as there are members of the NWA, they can't say that's the end of the NWA belt.

WP: So it's something that's never going to go away?

JC: Basically (laughs). As long as there are members of the NWA who are not affiliated with WCW, there will always be an NWA title. WCW can drop their recognition of it and not use it, but there would still be an NWA to name a champion and continue on with the name.

WP: Do you see that as a viable option if you, Coralluzzo and Gilbert got moving? To have a world champion coming in to do occasional shots.

JC: Yeah and the problem I see is when the NWA champion had 20 territories to work in, it was great. But now, you'd be hard pressed to find the guy to put the belt on to come to Smoky Mountain, WWA and ECW. As more territories eventually spring up and they will, but who knows how long it will take. The idea of an affiliation and a touring world champion is the best one. It's a matter of you don't want the world champion all the time, so you've got to have a bunch of places for him to go.

WP: I don't want to get you started on WCW. But briefly, what's your opinion of how they're doing in 50 words or less.

JC: (laughs) Aww Christ. I can't figure it out anymore. It's the daggumist thing I've ever seen in my life. I couldn't sit down and think of shit to do that was bad on purpose. I'm flabbergasted. For once, I'm at a loss for words because before it was bad. Now, it's ridiculous. They've got

some of the most talented minds I've ever seen thinking of that shit to do because there's no way that a dumb shit could think of anyway to f--- something up as good and as quickly and as regularly as they're doing it. It has to be some on purpose effort (laughs). Where do you even begin? Eric Bischoff for Christ sake. Putting him in charge of anything related to wrestling. Let me go out and find the guy working down at the Jiffy Lube and he'll certainly have some good ideas.

WP: Will he have a smile like Eric's?

JC: (laughs) I mean the whole thing's just ludicrous. I'm not surprised at anything. The mini-movie and the mass taping, they've finally convinced me there's almost no way to be surprised at whatever they do.

WP: If you had total control, would you go back and run WCW?

JC: Total control, but TBS still owned it? No, no, no, no, no, no. They'll always find a way to f--- it up. As long as TBS owns the thing, it's doomed. It's just a matter of

who's running it as to how quick it's going to go downhill. If all of a sudden they said, "Okay, we're going to take everything to do with the wrestling promotion and stick it in a building on Peachtree Street and have somebody run it and let us know at the end of the month what's happening and we're not even going to act like we own the thing," that's the only way that they will ever, ever do anything with it ever. They would just have to completely set it off to the side somewhere and have one guy run it and have him make all the decisions as far as who was hired and just deliver the tapes to TBS once a week.

WP: If Watts was allowed to do that, would it have worked?

JC: Yes. If they had left Bill alone and if they had him do exactly what I said. Take it away somewhere, not have to use the Turner program services to syndicate TV, no have to use Turner Home Entertainment. Just like it was under Crockett where they came down and did the TV once a week and that was it. Then Watts could have

done a great job with it. But as long as TBS owns it and controls it and f---s with it and sticks their nose into it and hires people based on whether their hair looks good, and hires people based on whether they're screwing some girl from Turner Home Entertainment, all of which has happened and continues to, there's no chance.

WP: I guess you don't want to be working with Ole?

JC: (laughs) You think Ole Anderson would be doing that shit if he had any kind of control? F--- no.

WP: He's done it before, go back to '83.

JC: Never this bad. Mini-movies. Did he do any of that shit? Did he do taping four months in advance? What they're doing is all of them are taking their money and doing shit that they know is the shits because they can make more money there doing that shits than they can make anywhere else. I don't want the money that bad to do shitty stuff.

Potshots Heard Round The World

By - Bill "Potshot" Kunkel

With this issue we welcome Bill "Potshot" Kunkel to the Wrestling Perspective family. Kunkel has written for many publications over the years, including a long stint as a featured columnist/cartoonist with Pro Wrestling Torch. Known for his biting satire, Kunkel has long been respected as one of wrestling's most talented writers. We hope you will find him a valuable addition to Wrestling Perspective.

When Paul dropped me a line asking if I'd be interested in contributing to the scholarly and distinctly high-tone *Wrestling Perspective*, I was kind of surprised. I'd

dropped out of the sheet scene almost a year earlier, about the same time I left Ric "Hotline" Carter's *WrestleTalk* radio show. My subscription to the *Observer* lapsed. Everybody else seemed to fold their little kayfabe sheets. I stopped watching wrestling regularly on TV. I hadn't even done any wrestling cartoons since the original *Pro Wrestling Sushi* got sliced.

I was dust. My time was spent on pathetically productive pursuits: editing and writing for *Electronic Games* magazine, designing computer and video games (*Batman Returns*, *Mad Dog McCree*

II, *Bart's Nightmare*, etc.) and working on some fiction.

Now here was the classiest sheet in graps inviting me on board as a columnist - and they don't even use cartoons! Pretty heady stuff, you must admit. Like the hooker who gets hired for her brains! So, I talked to Paul and told him I could probably watch enough wrestling to produce grist for the Potshot Mill. Then he gave me the bad news: two of my favorite things were editorially banned in *Wrestling Perspective*. Not only can't I use profanity, or obscenity, or any such exotic badinage, I can't write

uncomplimentary things about other sheet editors - no matter how bad the grammar gets! Theoretically, I presume this means I can write nasty things about David or Paul. Just my luck not to know any...

With two of my prime sources dried up, I presume they thought they had trapped me into writing intelligently about pro wrestling.

Hahahahahahahahahahaha.

I did the *WrestleTalk* show with Carter for about a year (8/91-8/92) from the Vegas World hotel/casino studio of KLAV-AM. It was a lot of fun, and I got a chance to "meet" all kinds of neat folks, from Paul E. Dangerously and Jim Cornette to Dutch Mantell and Bob Roop. But after a year of Sunday afternoons spent inside the aquarium-like studio we fondly called "Vagrant's World," I'd had enough radio. I explained my decision to Carter and he was a total gentleman about it.

The next Sunday I was determined to enjoy my new freedom, so I took a Walkman down to the pool and lounged in the sun while listening to Carter and new co-host Anthony Lamatta on my earphones. The show wasn't going well. The guest wrestler no-showed and as I headed back inside after an invigorating swim and sufficient melanoma exposure (you gamble out here, one way or another), I could hear Carter hitting the desperation button.

Following a tradition I began when Mike Tenay left *WrestleTalk* (at one point, Tenay, Carter and I co-hosted the show simultaneously), they were burying me, cracking wise about how I'd suddenly refused to do the show, turning prima donna, etc. Then someone called in with a rib about how they'd taken me to the airport earlier that day and put me on a plane for Connecticut.

So, I decided to give them a call and liven things up. I employed a persona I'd encountered many times during my 39

years in New York: over-the-top hostility blended lavishly with overweening arrogance. I screamed at Carter, telling him he was a total incompetent who'd screwed up our chance to get a network radio shot. I told him I was now working for "the Big Boys, the Titans of our industry" and that I'd bury him, Boston Gardens (my insulting nickname for Lamatta, a long-time Boston resident), and their show.

The skit got over big time, but not in the way I'd expected. I did such a broad reading, and threw in such obvious nonsense ("As my good friend Razor Ramon told me...") that I was sure the listeners would get a kick out of it. But, no, they were a trifle...upset.

"I always hated that Kunkel!" one former sycophant shrieked over the phone. "I knew he was up to no good! I can't believe he said that to you, Ric!"

Another former suck up was on an instant later with words of warning for Carter: "Watch this guy, Ric! I don't trust him. I never did!"

The opportunity was too much for Carter, who is in love with working people anyway. So I called up the next week, and the week after, oozing threats, if not machismo. I told them that their show was history and they were pre-history. I told them I'd bury them deeper than dinosaurs. Everybody played along, including the guests. People were calling Carter all week, going crazy, sputtering with rage. He loved it. In fact, it inspired him.

"This is what I want to do," he explained to me. "I want to make it seem like you snuck into KLAV and sweet-talked the secretary and somehow screwed us over on the radio contract and now you've got the show. Then I want you to do a whole show, by yourself, with us getting thrown out of the studio at the beginning."

I had to admit, it was brilliant. He began

dropping hints about contract problems, wondering whether perhaps I had been involved. Then, suddenly, one Sunday last September, wrestling fans all over Southern Nevada turned on their radios to - the show from Hell!

It began with the familiar *WrestleTalk* theme song, which was abruptly interrupted.

"Take that crap off!" I screamed at the engineer. "Now, put on the real theme." The strains of David Bowie singing "Cat People (Putting Out Fire)" filled the airwaves.

"Hello, good listeners. Welcome to the Potshot Hour! Hahahahaha!"

I then regaled my audience with the saga of how I'd had thugs physically eject Carter and Lamatta from the studio. While I was still gloating, a "furious" Ric Carter called from the lobby. I ridiculed him mercilessly, and ultimately cut him off.

Then came the calls.

It was a hell of an hour. I think my most perfectly obnoxious spot came when Lucha expert and imaginary WWF jobber Dan Farren called with Mexican news and I insisted that he give English translations for the wrestlers' names. "So, Farren, this 'Negro Casas' - what the heck kind of name is that? Black Houses?" I then began to yawn loudly while Farren attempted to read results, and he was eventually tossed off the air, "Since nobody really cares about these geeky little acrobats anyway..."

The show was a spectacular "success." People were howling with fury. Now we were ready for me to put over the "faces" on the following show. Once again, the "Potshot Hour" started with its new theme song, and I immediately picked fights with the prime buffoons in the audience, daring specific callers to ring in (none did), when suddenly, a commotion could be heard in the studio.

It was Carter and Lamatta, along with a couple of imaginary guards to "throw me out." I did a great job, I must admit, howling with indignation and shock when Carter explained how he'd straightened out the contract mess and was physically ejecting me.

"I'll be back!" I screamed as I left the studio, doing my best impression of Lee J. Cobb as Johnny Friendly at the end of *On the Waterfront*. "I'll be back and I'll getcha! I'll getcha all!!!"

Now what we didn't know, was that while we had cleared the gag with the station owner, no one had bothered to mention it to the station manager, who was at home recuperating from open heart surgery. When he turned on the radio and heard what appeared to be a major brawl erupting in his studio, he began fibrillating.

Seconds later, he was on the horn, ready to

send in Metro (Las Vegas Police Dept.), just before summoning an ambulance to take him back to intensive care.

It was a great bit, and, in fact, I recently turned face again, calling the station to talk with Dangerously about his new HDTV promotion and "making up" with Carter and Boston Gardens.

Wrestling at its finest - not a single punch was thrown but we almost killed a man in the audience!

SHORT SHOTS - WCW is now running some of the funniest stuff on TV, including Fred Ottman in a Darth Vader mask covered in Reynolds Wrap falling through a set wall and losing his mask on a live Clash. Or the description by Solie of "The Kongs, Awesome and King. From the unexplored confines of South Africa." You can't get stuff like this anywhere else. I love the

heavy duty workers being brought in by Ole: The Equalizer, Kongs, ShockMaster, Sid Vicious and the rest of the pathetic crew. Or how about former tongue-kissing Ninja Turtle, Chris Champion, as a Mikado parody called "Yoshi Kwan?" I was surprised his finisher wasn't dubbed "Yoshi's Cookie." WCW has now given us two white men pretending to be Black (P. N. News and Johnny B. Badd) and a Caucasian pervert posing as an anti-social oriental right out of *Steve Canyon*. These guys could mess up a nocturnal emission (how's that for avoiding profanity, Paul?) better than anyone in the business, but hell, they're so funny! ... Then there's Jim Ross in WWF, getting his tongue caught in a mangler: "He just put [that jobber] out of his mercy!" he revealed after a recent squash. Stop hanging out with Gino, Jim... That about dries me out, gang. Until next month, remember, life is like being a sled dog; if you aren't the lead hound, the view never changes.

In Perspective: Bob Armstrong

Along with Gordon Solie and Mr. Wrestling II, Bob Armstrong became a household name and a wrestling legend due to his impact on Georgia Championship Wrestling on a small independent television station that became WTBS. In this interview with David Skolnick, Armstrong gives his insights about the famed Georgia promotion and the wrestlers who worked there. The Bullet also discusses his origins, his wrestling sons, his current work with Smoky Mountain Wrestling and where he was during one of the most famous plane crash in wrestling's history.

Wrestling Perspective: You've had quite a storied career. How did it all start?

Bob Armstrong: It all started when I was a power lifter when I was a young man. I was very interested in that. The promoter in my hometown, Marietta, Georgia, saw me lifting and asked me would I be interested in starting wrestling. We trained for a little while. After my first match, I changed my

mind. I got my damn brains beat out and I thought, "Well, this might not be the game for me." An old-timer did it to me. I was a young man, about 26, and he was about 45. Pancho Villa was his name and boy, he made a pretzel out of me. I thought, "Good grief. It's not all strength and power in this wrestling profession." I thought about it for a month and went back and tried it again and I fared a little better the second time. That was the start.

WP: This was when?

BA: This was 30 years ago.

WP: Like you said, you started in Marietta.

BA: Yes, my hometown. I had won the power lifting championship, the Southeastern Nationals, and I won that and a promoter happened to be there watching me. Seeing that I was a hometown boy and he was a hometown promoter, he asked me

if I'd like to start wrestling. That's the way it all started.

WP: From there, where did you go?

BA: Well, I stayed around because I was a fireman and I tried to do both professions for about eight years. I wrestled and was a fireman at the same time and it was dragging me down. My health wasn't very good because I was fighting fires sometimes and breathing all that smoke in and the next night try to wrestle. It was pretty hard. I took it as long as I could and when I got to be stable on my feet, I could do it on my own. I've never regretted it. I've had a good career. Won most every title, the North American title was the biggest I ever won. At the time, it was right next to the World title.

WP: When you were a firefighter, that was part of your gimmick. You were

"Firefighter" Bob Armstrong.

BA: Yeah. That was it. I was at the Cobb County Fire Department and I started there about the same time I started wrestling. I tried that for several years but it was taking it out of me so I had to choose one or the other.

WP: You mostly stayed around the Georgia area throughout your career.

BA: Those first seven years I did. I'd go to Miami and wrestle sometimes or Tampa. One time I went to New York and I stayed three days, just when I had time off from the fire department. I'd try out different areas around the country, but I was lucky enough to wrestle in my home for at least those seven years. A lot of people don't have that kind of luck.

WP: You were there during the early days of TBS. Can you discuss the Gunkel-Paul Jones split?

BA: That happened when Buddy Fuller came in and Mr. Jim Barnett came in from Australia and he bought out 50 percent of the Atlanta office and Gunkel didn't like that, so Gunkel went out on his own. Soon after that, he died after a match with Ox Baker, so his wife kept on for about two years. Finally, the NWA bought out Ann Gunkel and she died later of cancer. Pretty sad story for the Gunkel family.

WP: You sided with Paul.

BA: Yes. Paul Jones was an idol of mine. He used that old figure four scissors, which I thought was one of the best holds in wrestling at the time and I was kind of his protégé. I just couldn't leave him. In fact, I was the only guy that stayed. A friend of mine worked for the Atlanta Fire Department and wrestled part-time. I told him what was going on and he stayed too. But he wasn't wrestling full-time. I was the only one on a full-time basis for him.

WP: Was that rough?

BA: Yeah, it was very rough. I lost a lot of good friends I wrestled in tag teams with who went with the Gunkels. I just felt bad having to leave my friends, but I felt a

loyalty to Paul Jones that I couldn't get rid of. Not that I was doing the right thing. Although I have mixed feelings about it.

WP: It turned out you ended up making the right move.

BA: Yes, actually it did. It turned out okay.

WP: This was during the early days of wrestling on TBS.

BA: Yes, it was originally on Channel 11 in Atlanta, the most popular local station for years. Everybody watched that. When Ted Turner came along, they started moving the wrestling program around to different times and people would complain they couldn't get wrestling at the regular hour they used to watch it. So then, Ted Turner talked to Mr. Gunkel about a deal. But at the time, you had to have converters to get a UHF channel on TVs. Back in those days, you just couldn't have another switch on your TV. You had to have a converter on top of your television. So when Georgia Championship Wrestling started with Ted Turner, we just had a little station in a little building and they sold converters in Atlanta and had them ordered out of New York and when wrestling went to TBS, so did the wrestling fans. And the rest is history. I was on the first card ever held at WTBS.

WP: At the time, did you realize how successful the marriage would be between TBS and wrestling?

BA: I had no idea. I had no idea of the success. Georgia was successful in itself. They had one or two towns running every night in the state of Georgia. But I didn't ever realize it would go to Canada, the whole United States and Mexico. And WTBS did open those doors for us. We spent a lot of time in states I never thought I'd ever go to in my whole life.

WP: It basically made a group of local Georgia wrestlers into international stars.

BA: Absolutely.

WP: A lot of legendary wrestlers came in and out of Georgia in those early years. One of the most famous was Roddy Piper.

Why don't you tell me a little bit about him in the early days?

BA: He had a completely different philosophy than myself and he and I never got along real good. We just didn't get along. They only put us together one time. We had a match in Atlanta at the Omni that was the last time we ever wrestled there. It got pretty wild and out of hand. That was the only time. I wanted to wrestle him again and he felt the same way. That was it. So Mr. Crockett booked us a few times in Greensboro and I fought there and wrestled. He was much in demand and I have a lot of respect for Roddy Piper.

WP: Did you realize he would be such a superstar?

BA: I had no idea. I never looked too much at the future. I didn't want to get too far ahead of myself. I kind of laid back and watched it all happen. I was amazed just like everybody else.

WP: You traded legendary barbs with him.

BA: I still get mail about that. He was quick witted. I'm an old country boy and I had to use my wits to get by too. Being raised on a farm, I got picked on a lot when I was a youngster by the older boys. I got quick witted pretty good.

WP: I want to throw out some names of people involved in Georgia Championship Wrestling and you give me your thoughts on them. First of all, when people think of Georgia, many think of Gordon Solie?

BA: The dean of announcers. That's the nickname we had for him. He was the dean. He was very instrumental in the success of the promotion. He had a lot of respect from people all around the country. He's a very knowledgeable guy about wrestling. When I was in Florida at one time, he actually got in the ring with me and I showed him some holds and he did that quite often so he would know what he was talking about. That's why he was one of the best.

WP: The Anderson Brothers.

BA: Legendary. The Minnesota Wrecking

Crew and brother, they were a wrecking crew. They had a lot of power and a lot of staying power too. I wrestled those guys one time for an hour and a half and it took me about a week to get over it.

WP: They had a very unique style.

BA: It was very simple wrestling. They just grabbed some part of your body and held on and that was it. They kept close to their corner and wore you out. They were very good at what they did. They'd come in low. They had a simple style, but they were the best at it.

WP: Tommy Rich.

BA: Tommy was a real fireball. He became a real superstar there. I met Tommy years ago in Nashville when I was wrestling up there. He used to come to my house and work out with me. I showed him how to use the weights. He never worked out with weights much. He was a good high school football player, but he didn't know much about weights and he didn't have the power in his upper body that he should have. I started him on weights and it wasn't long before he came back to Georgia and he really made a name for himself.

WP: Mr. Wrestling II.

BA: One of the best ever. That guy, his joints were like rubber. He originally wrestled as "Rubber Man" Walker, Johnny "Rubber Man" Walker before he put that mask on. He could get out of any hold. I'd try the same thing, but my joints wouldn't move like that. He could slip out of any hold. He was one of the smoothest wrestlers I've ever known.

WP: Tim Woods.

BA: Tim was great. I traveled with him quite a bit. We teamed up quite a bit when they'd have wrestling in two towns a night. Wrestling II and one of the other top guys would go to the other town. I did a lot of traveling with Tim all around the south Georgia area, down through Savannah and that area.

WP: The Freebirds became famous on

TBS.

BA: Oh, yes, made them national heroes. The anti-heroes is more correct.

WP: Ric Flair.

BA: Ric Flair would come through there as world champion. He was busy all over the country, but any time he was free, he'd come through Atlanta and get on TV. He loved to come to TBS simply because of the exposure. Ric would always do that. He's a smart man. He's the best in the business. He's one of the strongest and he's built for staying power too like the Anderson Brothers. I wrestled that guy for an hour and a half. I've wrestled him maybe 50 times and I've had more draws with him, beat him a few times. When he lost the title to Harley Race, he came back to the Florida area and I wrestled him three times and beat him three times in a row. Nobody expected that.

WP: Ted DiBiase. Back then, he was being groomed for a top spot.

BA: Yes, he had the natural talent. His dad was a professional wrestler. Iron Mike died in the ring. Another gentleman who came through here and started that I recognized as tough enough to go the distance was Arn Anderson. He started down here in this area and came through Florida and started his TV career and then went up to Crockett's area. A real superstar.

WP: Dusty Rhodes went through the territory many times.

BA: Dusty came in and out of here. In fact, after Dusty came here and we wrestled as partners and he went back to Florida, I went there too. I spent a year down there with him. It was a real blast. Florida had its best run it ever had. Seventeen straight sellouts in Miami, Florida.

WP: All your sons have reputations for being really great workers. Did you train them yourself?

BA: All I did was show them the basics and I let them hash it out between themselves. I showed them the basic moves and they were all pretty close to the same age so they

made each other much better wrestlers by wrestling around the house. They basically grew up with an interest in pro wrestling. Brad had a tough time. He was the first to start. He separated his shoulder in his first match. A month later, he started and he tried to protect one shoulder, he separated the other shoulder. He was seriously thinking about another career. So I told him to take time off and get yourself complete and let's try it again. So he took about three months off and started again.

WP: He was fortunate enough to have you there through his early years.

BA: He was 18 years old when he first started. We won the National titles against Saito and Mr. Fuji. It was amazing the talent at 18. He bought a Corvette right away, a brand new white Corvette.

WP: What do you think about how he's handled by WCW?

BA: Well, they've got some big, tough boys and they all seem to be really good at what they do.

WP: For a while they kept him in the prelims and then Watts came in and he's always liked him.

BA: Yes, Watts is a guy who likes to do things in a big way. I wrestled him years back. First time I wrestled him, he was hard to move. After about six weeks of wrestling back and forth, he went to Florida and I went down there and I wrestled with him. He's a man who likes to do things in a big way.

WP: Your son, Steve, worked for the WWF for a while. What do you think of that style, more of an emphasis on characterization?

BA: I think it's great. I think a major audience for wrestling is children. When I was a child, I loved wrestling. I was amazed by it and they had nothing like the athletes they have today. I think that's fine. They have a lot of children coming to see them.

WP: How would you compare being a wrestler now to when you broke in 30 years

ago?

BA: Well, when I broke in I was considered a musclehead. Nobody worked out with weights that much. Maybe out of the whole group of wrestlers in Atlanta, there were only about three of us that worked out. The rest of those guys were just old-fashioned wrestlers. They could move you and could stick your head up your butt in about two seconds. You had to be real careful with them. Real careful cause they were tough old guys. Most of them were very tough guys.

WP: Who was the best shooter you were ever in the ring with?

BA: I guess probably Lou Thesz. Thesz was one of the masters for sure. He would tie you up in knots. He certainly would do that.

WP: You were with TBS on and off for 15 years.

BA: Yes, that's who started me. I also worked for Continental down in Florida and Alabama. We'd go to Mississippi once in a while. I live in Pensacola. It was a closer territory for me. I got tired of traveling so much. It got me going up north and then staying away from home weeks at a time. It got really old for me.

WP: Continental had a great run at one time.

BA: It did real good. That business went on for 10 years without really ever a serious let down. Most wrestling companies about three or four or five years in will have a big dip. It goes in cycles like that. This area here had a 10-year run. I was real happy with that.

WP: With you working with Smoky Mountain and having extensive experience with regionals, do you see wrestling going back to that?

BA: I think there's a place for it. You'll always have the two big outfits, New York and WCW. You'll always have those two outfits. I think there's room for a local promotion. We're doing all right. The TVs are catching on. When people see Smoky

Mountain, they're going to love it. Good guys up there. The competition is great. They're doing some things that are very innovative. I see it doing real well. I'm real happy with it.

WP: It's more of an old style.

BA: I think so. It reminds me of when I started. Lot of knock you down, drag you out. That's kind of the way I started. I just love Smoky Mountain.

WP: Brad works often in Japan. What do you think of the Japanese promotions?

BA: It's a lot faster. They train those young guys and they train them hard and fast. You've got to be on your toes. They're training those young guys hard. They make a lot of mistakes and a lot of them get hurt. A lot of young guys in Japan don't make it. They give them a few months and if they think they're not going to make it, that's it for them. So they're training twice as hard, they get hurt twice as easy. There's no chess game involved over there. It's just go at it. I've worked there twice. In 1968, I stayed for four weeks and went to Korea on the last week for five weeks and I went back in 1972 when Inoki first opened his wrestling program there and stayed for six weeks. Most of the time I wrestled Inoki; fine athlete. He's truly a gentleman. He always respected me. The first time I was over there in '68, we wrestled each other and were about dead even. I was in good shape and so was he. He gained a lot of respect for me and I did for him. So when he opened his territory four years later and started his area against the competition he had been wrestling for, he called me and asked me to come. So I did. We had some knock down, drag out matches. It became kind of a personal pride thing. We're about the same size. We always weighed about the same. So we had some real good matches and that ticked him off. Since then, he's become a hero and he's never forgotten it. He called my son in and made Brad feel real good. He called my son in and told him to tell me hello.

WP: One of your most famous feuds was against the Mongolian Stomper. There's that famous picture in the wrestling magazines with you bleeding buckets.

BA: Oh gosh, I wrestled that guy a thousand times. He's a tough old codger, I'll tell you that, buddy. I wrestled him all over the southeast all the way from Nashville to Miami. I got opened up in that one match, 12 stitches; about three inches over my eyebrow. I'd been hit over the eye lots of times. This guy hit me three inches over my eye and opened me up; 12 stitches. I went to the hospital, I was bleeding badly. It was a heck of a match. It's one I won't forget.

WP: In later years, you became known as the Bullet.

BA: I was pretty quick when I was younger. Gordon Solie named me "Bullet" Bob Armstrong. He just came up with that. He said that I was faster than a speeding bullet and it just caught on. From then on, he always called me that. I use it now when I wrestle with a special mask on my face, a half mask. It supports my nose and plastic under my eyes, holding them up. It's just support. I feel much better with a mask on than I do without.

WP: You've been in the business for so many years. Do you see anyone in your opinion who is wrestling's next big superstar?

BA: Well, I tell you there are a lot of guys with potential. They have to get staying power too. Scott and Rick Steiner, those two guys are fantastic. They're already superstars. If they get that longevity, either one of them can go all the way. I love their style. They do some things that are unreal. Of course, a lot of people are injured in those kind of matches. They've hurt a lot of people they've wrestled. They're tough boys. You've got to be able to stay with them. If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen. That's the one thing about professional wrestling. You've got to know how to wrestle. You may wrestle a guy that's 195 pounds one day and the next night you come up against a 300-pounder

who moves like a cat. If you're not ready for all of them, you're not going to have the staying power.

WP: A year ago, WCW had a TBS anniversary Clash. Good to see some of the guys?

BA: Oh, yeah. I got to talk to Andre the Giant. I spent most of the night talking to him and Gordon. I went through the dressing room and took a look at all the wrestling talent. There are some mighty fine wrestlers there.

WP: Having raised boys who have become pros, I want to ask you about second-generation wrestlers.

BA: It's just growing up with wrestling. I didn't want any of my sons to wrestle because I had been through it. I had bones broken, late night drives when you couldn't get a flight. I had all that and I wanted an easier life for my sons. It's hard to tell a kid no when he's wanted to do that all his life. They see you as a superstar and they want to be a part of it.

WP: Have they always wanted to be wrestlers?

BA: Every one of them. Every one of them. My youngest son came home from the Marine Corps and wrestled. He's going to be a good one. He's agile and he's got the best start than any of my sons had because he was the youngest. He wrestled all my sons. He's 6'4" and about 240 and I believe he's going to have a heck of a future.

WP: So what does the future hold for you?

BA: I enjoy Smoky Mountain now. I think it's catching on. I'm training and competing.

WP: In your 30 years, do you have a memorable moment?

BA: The first time I beat Ric Flair was very memorable. I beat Lou Thesz in Miami when I was a real underdog in 1974, which got me a shot at Jack Brisco, who then was the champion. I wrestled him the next week and I wrestled him for an hour. I'm

real proud of that. I've had so many memorable moments. I won a Cadillac at the first Omni show ever held. The first time they ever wrestled at the Omni, I won a '73 Cadillac. I was real proud of that. That's another memorable moment. There's been so many. I'm looking now at a trophy over I have on my mantle I got from the Independent Wrestlers and Writers Association. They had a convention in Birmingham and they had people from New Zealand, Australia, Japan, I guess about a collection of 300 wrestling writers and they gave me this trophy as outstanding wrestler of the year when I was in Continental back when I won the Continental title. That was another high point. Gordon told me that on TV; he was there when I won it.

WP: You're so famous for so many great matches at the Omni. Is that a special place for you?

BA: Yeah, it is. When Brad and I won that National title, they invited teams from all over; Japan. It was similar to the Crockett Cup. It was at the Omni and we went all the way that night. We wrestled four times. He was young and full of it and I had experience and we went all the way. The crowd went absolutely nuts and so did I. We held that National tag team title for quite a while. We lost that title I believe to the Anderson Brothers. I think we won it back. At one time, I had five titles, I can't remember what all of them were. It got real confusing. If you've got one, you can kind of concentrate on it. I had every title they had in Georgia and I won the North American title. It's kind of hard on you. That's why I take things a day at a time. The North American title was through Oklahoma, Bill Watts and before him, Leroy McGirk. So he had that light heavyweight title, which Danny Hodge held for many years, mighty strong. He was as strong as a bull. They had the North American title, which was a stop to the World title. The thing was when I won the North American title, I didn't get half as many shots at the World title since I was always defending it somewhere. It was a

step to it if you could ever get to it.

WP: Brad beat Ernie Ladd for it back in '85 or so.

BA: We were the only father and son team to ever do that. I worked for Watts in and out. In 1974, that was the longest I ever worked for him in Florida. In '74, that was the best year Florida ever had. He was a heck of a wrestler. I was there in '74. Don Muraco was there. We teamed up quite a bit and Buddy Roberts and Jerry Brown. The Freebird idea started from that I think. They were teaming as the Hollywood Blondes. They had Gary Hart there and a big Korean named Pak Song. The Mongolian Stomper was there. It was a real talented bunch of wrestlers in 1974. Dusty Rhodes was on fire. It was just loaded with talent. If you wanted any recognition, you worked for Florida. We had very little time off. I trained at every gym I saw to stay in competition. I was lucky when I got there, I beat Buddy Colt for that North American title in Jacksonville in 29 seconds. That was the easiest match I had for the North American title and it was the first one. I beat him and I held on to it until the Mongolian Stomper finally beat me.

WP: What was Buddy like?

BA: Buddy was one of the best until he got in that plane accident. He was one of the best. Also with him was a young guy who was going to be a real phenomenon in this business. I wrestled him in the last match for that Cadillac, Bobby Shane. He started when he was 16 years old and he had a brilliant career ahead of him. Bobby Shane would have been a major force in professional wrestling. It was a real shame. He couldn't swim. He hated the water. I was there when they pulled the plane out. He was still strapped to his seat. It was a horrible thing. It finished Buddy Colt's career. Austin Idol and Ric Flair were seriously injured. Very tragic. We flew so much and had near fatal accidents so many times that I don't fly now. I flew once recently and I told all the guys at Smoky Mountain I would not go on another plane.

I've had some bad experiences. I've nearly been down two or three times. In fact, the night Bobby Shane got killed, we got to the airport five minutes before they did. It was fogged in but because I was with Eddie Graham, a real popular figure in Florida, they let us land the plane and turned them away. They turned them away and they had to go to another airport when the lighting didn't work. I was real lucky. Everywhere

we went, we flew; four or five times a week; in thunderstorms. We came out of Tallahassee a real bad time and we flew right over the water to get back down there. We nearly went down. I've seen lightening dance on those wings. The storms make you nervous. I think back about it and what an idiot I was. When you're young and full of it, you wanted to get there and wrestle no matter how you got there. When you get a

little older and a little smarter, you realize how close you came to death so many times. You change your mind about things. When the guys are five minutes behind you, it's something.

WP: Thank you, Bob.

BA: My pleasure. I hope I've helped you in some way.

Angels With Dirty Faces: Part I

By - The Phantom Of The Ring

The history of professional wrestling is basically a history of gimmickry. Whether it be a mask, a special match, or a feud, to name a few, it is the gimmick that provides the fuel and the resulting angle that provides the spark. When the two are right, the result is box office gold. One of the most durable gimmicks over the years has been centered on the freak. Freaks have been a staple of wrestling since the early Twenties, and when combined with ethnicity, often have the power to breathe new life into the game. The best and longest lasting of the freak gimmicks has been the coming of the "Angels." Since their introduction in the early Forties, they've had a strong influence on the game, to say the least. The gimmick strengthened as the years went by, and flourished until the late Fifties, when the decline in wrestling attendance forced promoters to discard gizmos and angles that had lost their luster. In the next few columns, we will examine the Angel phenomenon, beginning with the man who started the whole craze: Maurice Tillet, better known as The French Angel.

Tillet came to this country in early January 1940, at the advanced age of 46. His publicity stated that he was born in the Russian Ural Mountains of French parentage. His mother was a professor of Philology in Rheims, France, where Tillet

was actually born. At the age of 21, he went to serve is compulsory tour in the military, serving as an engineer on a submarine in the French Navy. But near the end of his tour, something went drastically wrong with his health. No one was certain of the cause, but the result was diagnosed as acromegaly, a disease of the pituitary gland that causes a deformity of the bone structure and respiratory system. Other notable sufferers include Abraham Lincoln, actors Rondo Hatton and Paul Bentley, and Andre the Giant. As the disease was not crippling at that stage, Tillet was able to attend college, where he graduated with a degree in languages.

In 1937, his life took its fateful turn when he met Karl Pojello in Paris. Pojello, an American of Lithuanian extraction, was one if the greatest light-heavyweight wrestlers in the history of the sport. At the time he met Tillet, Pojello was on a scouting expedition for new talent to bring back to the States. During the Thirties, Europe had become a fertile breeding ground for wrestling talent. Such luminaries as Danny O'Mahoney, Henri De Glane and Dick Shikat were discovered there, not to mention countless lesser names.

Pojello was awed by the 5'6", 240 lb. Frenchman and convinced Tillet of the

money to be made in America if he let Pojello train him. Pojello spent about four weeks making Tillet into something that could pass for a wrestler, and then took his protégé on a barnstorming tour of Europe to gain experience. Tillet was an immediate hit as his looks insured sellouts consisting of both wrestling fans and the merely curious. Pojello then took Tillet to England, where Tillet would set box-office records as the advance publicity of his visit brought out the crowds.

The big money, however, could only be made in America, and after spending three years in Europe, Tillet was ready for the United States. Pojello almost saw his dream go up in smoke when Tillet had immense difficulty getting through customs at Ellis Island. He was held there for several days as the customs officers tried to make up their mind whether or not to let him in the country. But Paul Bowser spoke up for Tillet, making the offer of gainful employment, and it was finally decided to let the strange looking Frenchman into the country.

Bowser and Pojello immediately put out publicity sheets about the "monster" from France. Because his nickname in Paris was "The Angel," Pojello and Bowser decided to bill him as "The French Angel." The

Angel made his American debut in Boston on January 30, 1940. At the time, Boston was experiencing a drop off in attendance as the heyday of Irish champions, O'Mahoney and Casey, was over. But this night, the crowd, mostly curious due to the heavy publicity, reached approximately 8,000. The newspapers were out in full force as they were equally enticed by the publicity. They reported that when Tillet walked out, the crowd roar became a hush. Several women were reported to have fainted. But when Tillet acknowledged his introduction, the crowd burst into cheers and a star was born. Tillet's opponent that night was Luigi Bacigalupi, a regular jobber for Bowser.

As the bout started, Bacigalupi played the heel, gouging, punching and kicking. Tillet shook off the punishment and countered with a variety of wrestling holds, going from a side headlock into a hammerlock, full nelson, armlock and head scissors with a rapidity that awed the crowd. When Bacigalupi broke free from the headscissors and leapt to his feet, Tillet clamped on his bear hug. This is what the crowd waited for; the publicity about Tillet stated that he had killed three wrestlers in Europe with this hold. As Bacigalupi went limp from the hug, Tillet switched to a standing crotch and nelson, body slamming his opponent for the pin in 5:24. The second fall was even shorter, 2:12, although with the same finish. The post-match publicity stated that Bacigalupi was unable to wrestle for six weeks after this match.

Tillet had made his fortune. He proved so popular in New England, especially with the kids, that he was put over as the champion in the late Forties. In 1948, Tillet became an American citizen, and after his active days were over, he moved into the front office. Tillet died in the mid-Fifties as his disease caught up with him, only hours after learning of the death of his best friend, Pojello.

Next Issue: The Angel Explosion Of The Forties

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